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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [CU](#) [VE](#) [UNESCO](#)

SUBJECT: UNESCO: MARTI PRIZE

REF: (A) Paris 8487 (notal), (B) HAVANA 304 (notal)

Classified by DCM Andrew Koss, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) As a result of Mission inquiries, additional information has been obtained about the chicanery behind the awarding of the Marti prize to Hugo Chavez. It has become clear that it was deliberately orchestrated slap at the United States by individuals in the UNESCO secretariat working in cahoots with certain delegations. The prize, one of 35 given by UNESCO, was first awarded in 1995 during the US absence from UNESCO. It is funded by the Cuban government; the winner receives \$5,000. This is the first time the prize has been awarded to a political figure. According to the prize rules, the purpose of the prize is "to promote and reward an activity of outstanding merit that, in accordance with the ideals and spirit of Jose Marti and embodying a nation's aspiration to sovereignty and its struggle for liberty, contributes, in any region of the world, to the unity and integration of countries in Latin American and the Caribbean."

12. (U) According to contacts at UNESCO, six of the ten nominations received by the secretariat proposed Chavez. Those six were nominations from Cuba, Panama, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela. The jury included the South African writer, Nadine Gordimer, an amcit--Ivan Shulman of the University of Illinois (note: UNESCO did not follow its procedures when it asked an amcit to participate and did not notify the delegation or the National Commission), representatives of the Cuban government, the newly arrived Uruguayan ambassador to UNESCO, Armando Hart Dávalos, and academics from Benin, France and Cuba. The jury did its work exclusively by correspondence and all members voted for Chavez.

13. (C) Jim Kulikowski (protect), an amcit who would normally clear all correspondence, including the nomination, going to the Director General, tells us that he was bypassed and never saw the paper before it reached the DG. Other sources tell us that no UNESCO DG has ever rejected a unanimous recommendation for a prize and that DG Matsuura has made it a firm policy not to change recommendations of independent juries. He adopted this policy in the face of pressure placed on him by China when a Chinese journalist was chosen as recipient of the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize. That pressure included threats by the Chinese to leave UNESCO if the prize was awarded to a Chinese citizen. (Comment: Clearly this was a bluff as Chinese national now serves as chairman of the Executive Board.) Other recipients of the Cano prize have included Cuban, Zimbabwean, Burmese and Syrian journalists.

14. (C) Comment: Whatever his policy about not overturning prize decisions, the DG made a terrible political call. He could have easily overturned this nomination by pointing out that this prize had never previously gone to a political figure. The administration of the Marti prize is under UNESCO's division of Social and Human Sciences which remains populated by a number of long-term anti-American staff. In the wake of the cultural diversity saga, it appears that there are still countries at UNESCO looking to score political points against the United States. We would like to know if the ambassadors of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Panama were freelancing, as often is the case at UNESCO, or were operating under instructions. The DG now seems to be very embarrassed by this and arranged for the head of the UNESCO Havana office to be out of the country the day of the event, which explains the absence of UNESCO officials at the ceremony the day of the event.
Oliver